1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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and there is plenty of porridge and beer. Cow argues that anyhow porridge without milk is unpalatable and that her milk will be finished by the time Millet is ripe. It is difficult to confirm these variations in the yield of milk or to estimate their importance, but the tendency for it to rise slightly in the dry season is indicated in the chart opposite.

Millet is consumed as porridge and beer in large quantities in the months between the first harvest and departure for dry-season camps. If the harvest has been good people like to eat their daily porridge in camps, and when the camp grain-supply runs short women journey to the villages to replenish it. When camps break up and people return to their villages millet consumption increases, beer being again brewed, and in a good year there is sufficient to satisfy requirements till the new harvest is ripe. In a normal year Nuer can just tide over these months if they are economical and have been careful not to use much grain in camp. Only in the most favoured parts of the country are they assured of an adequate supply throughout the year. In most parts there is always a very narrow margin between sufficiency and want, and in a bad year starvation is not infrequent. If the crops fail people survive on milk, fish, and wild fruits, and in extremity may kill some of their beasts. Rinderpest is considered a worse calamity. When rinderpest and failure of crops occur in the same year people expect the older age-sets to be wiped out. Much suffering may be caused by excessive drought or flood, which injure both crops and grazing.

There are good and bad fishing years. Generally, over the greater part of the country, consumption of fish is very low, or entirely absent, at the height of the rains. It rises rapidly to a peak at the commencement of the dry weather, and after descending from this point of great abundance remains fairly constant through the drought, rising again in the early rains. Meat of domesticated stock is mainly eaten after harvest when sacrifices and feasts take place. Cattle are seldom slaughtered in the dry season and, in my experience, Nuer do not kill many wild animals, so that consumption of meat is very low at this time of year, though the deficiency is to some extent made up by bleeding the cows and, in rinderpest years, by eating the carcasses of its victims. On the whole the curve of meat con-

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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throughout that period. This area is known as the *toic*,[1] and is of value for reasons other than pasture, for the pools and lagoons are full of fish which provide an important item of diet at that time of the year. These conditions determine the seasonal migrations of the Nuer in search of pasture for their cattle, cultivation, and other activities which are part of their economy.

Physical conditions varying from thick bush country, sandy ridges, open grasslands stretching mile after mile with scarcely a tree to break the horizon, to marshland and papyrus swamp, are found in all parts of Nuerland. In the Zeraf Valley, a few miles west of that river, there is a long and almost continuous ridge where the Lak, Thiang, and a few of the Gaawar have their permanent villages. The banks of the Zeraf are high and well defined in its lower reaches, and in some places villages are built close to the river's edge, but to the west the country tails away into swampier ground until it reaches the papyrus swamps of the Bahr el Jebel. A large proportion of Lak country and part of Thiang is covered with acacia bush, land which provides only poor grazing and an abundance of biting flies such as the striped *tabanids* which are the agent through which direct infection of trypanosomiasis is conveyed. For this reason Lak country is considered poor for cattle. The area on the east bank of the Zeraf is occupied by the majority of the Gaawar and is much less densely populated. High ground is more limited and dispersed, and the people have to contend with serious floods in their permanent settlements, but such conditions produce more plentiful grazing. In the east is the Duk Ridge, a series of sandy outcrops running parallel to the river about forty miles inland. This area was densely populated in Dinka times and in the early stages of the Nuer invasion, and it remains a refuge for the Gaawar in times of heavy flood. In the exceptional floods of 1917–18, which the Nuer refer to as *pilual*, the Duk ridge was packed with refugees fleeing from the rising waters.

The country occupied by the Lou Nuer has all the characteristics of Gaawar country, though the better drained land on which they build their villages is more concentrated, and there is no perennial river running through it. A few of the Lou move to the Sobat River during the dry season and many to the country bordering the Pibor River, but the rest remain along the *toics* left on the edges of the khor Fullus and its tributaries. Those who move eastwards have been something of a problem to the Administration in recent years, for there is a tendency to settle permanently in Anuak country and sometimes over the border in Abyssinia. The cause of this movement is presumably increasing population in man and cattle and the desire

[1] This word has no more precise meaning than 'marshland' in English, and is often used very loosely to describe any area which provides pasture during the dry months of the year.

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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Disputes are easily settled by the courts, though execution of judgement is often slow.

Loans Arising from the Institution of Nak

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Slightly different situations arise from the institution known as '*nak*'.[1] It appears probable that *nak*—the common word meaning 'to kill', but in this context meaning 'a slaughter'—was part of the tribal ceremonies concerned with the division of age-sets. Age-mates of the younger age-set would segregate themselves from the rest of the community at the cattle-byre of one of their number and live entirely on the meat of oxen slaughtered for the occasion.

Two or three of the youths would club together to provide an ox and, if their immediate relatives were unable to supply one, they would appropriate one from someone else. In this they were given considerable licence and, should the owner object, they could seize it with impunity. Public opinion would not allow the owner to resist, and certainly he would be unable nowadays to obtain immediate redress in the courts. In return, the youths are bound by convention, with the full force of public opinion behind it, to make return after a specified number of years (usually announced by the *wut ghok*).

The exchange values of cattle provided in this manner are much higher than those recognized in normal exchanges or loans. They are:

1 large bull=2 cow-calves and 1 bull-calf.
1 medium bull=2 cow-calves.
1 bull-calf=1 cow-calf.

The debts were not, of course, discharged with the rigidity which these rates imply, but they are quoted by Nuer as being traditional. Just as a man is expected to hand over his ox without show of reluctance in the first place, so would his debtors be expected to discharge their obligations without argument. Nuer are particularly emphatic on this point, but disputes are, none the less, frequently taken to court.

Nearly all these exchanges are necessary to meet some ritual situation, and are therefore of frequent occurrence. Sacrifice is extremely common, and Nuer consume more meat than is commonly supposed. Recent statistics indicate that a large proportion of the total cattle population is slaughtered.[2]

Exchange of Cattle for Grain

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Finally, cattle are sometimes exchanged for grain in times of famine. This has not been so frequent in recent years, because grain, imported

[1] I have discussed this institution in more detail in an article, 'The Age-set System and the Institution of 'Nak' among the Nuer', *S.N.R.*, 1948.
[2] See Jonglei Investigation Team, *Progress Report, 1948–9*.

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by Arab merchants, is usually available and bought with cash. Cases of this kind sometimes appear before the courts. The facts are not usually denied by the defendant, but execution is often resisted.

Gifts Given in Friendship (math)

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Another situation in which cattle are involved, and which is a frequent cause of litigation, is the institution of the 'Best Friend', known in Nuer as *math*. Two men will often form a bond of friendship by exchanging cattle either as a one-sided loan or as a direct exchange, each party taking the other's cow. This can scarcely be described as trade, but is often the cause of dispute since friends fall out.

Nger Ngwen v. *Can Nyoi* (*Jihany Nuer Case*).

Nger and Can were 'best friends' (*math*). Nger gave Can a black cow as a gift. Can gave Nger a cow when Nger got married. Nger then asked Can to give him a cow in milk in order to feed his children. Can obliged by giving him a cow which he had received on the marriage of his daughter. Nger, however, considered that the cow was a bad one and, after a violent quarrel with Can, demanded that their 'friendship' should be broken (*dak math*) publicly and that Can should give back his black cow. The matter was taken to court, but Nger's claim was thrown out as groundless since Can had already given him two cows in exchange.

Exchanges of this sort are a corollary to this form of institutionalized friendship. Disputes of the kind mentioned above are simple enough, though often heated. It is perhaps surprising that they should appear before the courts at all, because the issues must be clear to everyone and there is rarely any doubt.

5. THE INFRINGEMENT OF RIGHTS IN PROPERTY

Self-help

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If the seizure of cattle, the property of another man, is defined as 'theft', then theft of cattle is a common offence among the Nuer. Nuer, however, distinguish clearly between what is considered licensed seizure, either openly or by stealth, and theft for which the thief can produce no customary justification. The word *kwal*, which is used loosely to describe both forms of misappropriation, is employed regularly, but in its more specific meaning it refers to this seizure of what is considered a man's right. Used in connexion with cattle the word implies that the culprit, however mistaken he may be, believes that through kinship ties or in settlement of a debt he has a legal claim to the cattle. Again, a man may seize for himself cattle which he regards as his just due in compensation for some injury done to him by their owner. Thus, for example, a man may seize six head of cattle

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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THE SACRIFICIAL ROLE OF CATTLE

231 The very special circumstances in which cattle are killed for
731 food are times of severe famine and in what are called *nak*, or in
261 some parts of Nuerland *kanar* or *cuel*, camps. Within my own short experience, in 1931, a year of great hunger, the Lou Nuer killed many oxen for food, and during a famine in western Nuerland in 1935 a great number of beasts were slaughtered to keep the people alive. Dr. Howell says that in the Zeraf valley in 1943, likewise a year of famine, animals were being killed for food.[1] The Lou Nuer even have a reputation, of which they are ashamed, for killing oxen when hungry, for not waiting, that is, till faced with starvation. How often this situation used to occur is not, and cannot, be known. If it is not altogether a modern phenomenon, we may suppose that it was much less likely to have arisen before rinderpest depleted the herds and imposed peace prevented their rehabilitation through raiding, the milk supply thus being lessened.[2] *Nak* camps are presumably so called because they are
231 formed for the express purpose of killing (*nak*) oxen. They are
881 formed in some years only, in the rains or at the commencement of the dry season, by youths, each of whom takes an ox to the camp where one by one they are slaughtered and the young men gorge themselves on their flesh. Now that cattle have become scarcer two youths may share a single animal, though it is still thought that there ought to be an ox to a man. There is some doubt about the precise significance of this custom. When I published an account of the Nuer age-set system[3] I considered that it did not form an integral part of the rites of initiation but was only incidentally connected with them. I may have been wrong in this conclusion, and my own later researches revealed features which incline me to accept Dr. Howell's contention that they are connected with the age-set system.[4] Certainly there is more in the *nak* than merely killing oxen for feasting. That it has a ritual significance is clear from the fact that the youths who take part in it are segregated. Girls are not allowed to enter, or at any rate to sleep
[834] in, the camps. Abstinence is imposed at a time when the company of girls and their favours are a Nuer's chief interest. Nor may the

[1] P. P. Howell, 'The Age-dist System and the Institution of "Nak" among the Nuer' (with a Note by E. E. Evans-Pritchard), *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1948, p. 180. I was told that on raids on the Dinka pillaged oxen were slaughtered for food. [2] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, pp. 19–20.
[3] 'The Nuer: Age-Sets', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1936.
[4] P. P. Howell, ibid.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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seeing that an injustice has been done. The man had no right to take the life of the ox and by doing so he committed a fault. In sacrificial invocations Nuer explain to God why the life of the ox is being taken, and they may also address the ox and tell it why it is being killed—not that they think it understands. They are justifying themselves in taking its life.

Consequently I was not surprised to learn from Dr. Mary Smith, whom I asked to inquire into the question, that when cattle are killed in time of famine Nuer, though they do not consecrate the beasts, may make an invocation over them asking God that 'the meat may be soft in their stomachs and not bring them sickness'. This does not constitute sacrifice, there being no sacrificial intention, but it shows that there is a feeling of guilt about killing animals for food even when hunger compels it, and we can say that all cattle, and also sheep and goats, are reserved, or set apart, for sacrifice and their lives should not be taken, except in the special circumstances I have mentioned, for any other purpose. In that sense we may speak of cattle as being 'sacred'. If we do so, however, we must note that they are not sacrificed because they are regarded as sacred intrinsically, or for reasons extraneous to the sacrificial situation, but, on the contrary, they are regarded as sacred only because they are reserved for sacrifice and in the sense defined by that purpose. I have discussed beasts of the herd only and not those of the flock because, as we have noted earlier, in sacrifices they are 'cattle', surrogates for oxen. It is pre-eminently their role to play the victim's part in sacrifice and they are consequently also reserved for sacrifice, but the sacrificial equivalence is always between *ran* and *yang*, man and 'cow', never between man and sheep or goat, for even when it is a sheep or goat which is being killed the ideal equivalence is preserved in speech.

In order that the sacrificial killing of beasts of the flocks and herds may be seen in a wider setting both of the taking of lives of creatures and of the eating of flesh, it should be realized that, except for fish, Nuer seldom kill wild creatures but rely almost entirely on the flesh of their domesticated animals for meat. For religious reasons they are averse to killing birds, except occasionally the ostrich, to which the same symbolism does not attach, for its feathers; and also reptiles, except the turtle and the crocodile (perhaps occasionally the monitor lizard). But even where there is no objection to killing animals, as in the case of mammals, Nuer